

I S M A N
RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS BELIEF?

A LECTURE

DELIVERED BEFORE THE MEMBERS OF THE

Hamilton Mercantile Library Association,

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(AND NOW PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST,

BY THE

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PREFACE.

THE Lecture on man's responsibility for his belief, herewith submitted to the Public, was delivered to the young men of the "Hamilton Mercantile Library Association," as one of a series, for which the members of that Association, with a commendable desire to find suitable occupation for their leisure hours, and with a view to their intellectual and moral improvement, had secured the services of various ministers and other individuals, during the past winter. Soon after its delivery, the managing Committee of the Association, requested the author to allow them to publish it in pamphlet form. This request he felt that he could not refuse. In acceding to it, however, he explained to the Committee, what he would now also explain to those who may honor it with a perusal, that it was not composed with a view to publication, and that had he been appearing before the public of his own accord, he would have felt it desirable to illustrate and fortify at much greater length, his views on some of the controverted points of which it treats. Within the compass of a single Lecture, it was possible for him to do little more than sketch the outline of his argument,—rather suggesting to his hearers, the mode in which the subject should be investigated and decided, than professing to exhaust it.

As it is, however, its brevity may be a greater recommendation in the view of some to its perusal, than it was in the author's to its publication. And it is now submitted to those who take an interest in such subjects, in the hope that it may serve to confirm the opinions of those who agree with its conclusions, and that it may direct those are still inquiring, to such a solution of the question discussed, as shall stand the scrutiny of that day, when only *truth* shall abide.

In preparing it for the press, a few alterations have been made, but these will be found immaterial.



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IS MAN RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS BELIEF?

THE question which, as you are aware, I am now to discuss,—the question, “Is man responsible for his belief,” is not merely as some are apt to fancy, a curious and somewhat abstruse question in Ethics, but a question of immense practical importance; in which all have an interest, on which all, too, must in one form or other, come to a decision, and the decision come to on which, must necessarily exert a powerful influence, either for good or evil. Whatever the origin of our beliefs, especially of our beliefs on moral and religious subjects, it must be plain to every one, who has ever studied his own mental history, or traced the secret influences in men’s minds, which mould the character of succeeding generations, and determine the destinies of the world, that such beliefs have a most important influence in the formation of our moral and religious character, and not less so in the regulation of our conduct, in the highest of all departments of duty, that viz: which relates to our preparation for eternity. And the view which we take of the responsibility connected with beliefs,—thus exerting an influence so vast and eternal,—must necessarily affect the formation of our beliefs themselves. Consciously or unconsciously, it will tell on our mode of dealing with the evidence on which truth is presented to us; it will tell, too, on our mode of contemplating the truth itself. It were at variance with all experience to suppose, that the man who goes to the investigation of truth, under the solemnizing influence of the feeling that he is responsible to God, for every conclusion at which he arrives, every opinion which he forms, will not be more likely to arrive at the knowledge of the truth, than the man who goes to the investigation, imagining that belief, however erroneous, if only sincere, can involve no criminality, and expose to no condemnation.

Fortunately the great majority of men, however inadequately they may be impressed with a sense of their responsibility, assent to it, as an almost self-evident truth, that man is responsible for his belief; and this assent, originating in the clear testimony of unbiased conscience, is sanctioned by the explicit declarations of the word of God. But a sceptical philosophy has often started doubts on the subject; and names ✓

of high authority in literature and science, have openly avowed the opinion that man is *not* responsible for his belief, and have attempted to defend it on philosophical grounds. Among the supporters of ultra liberal views in politics too, the favorite maxim, that man is not responsible to man for his belief,—a maxim which, with certain qualifications, is sound, and important as the only basis on which religious toleration, or rather, equality among the members of the same commonwealth, can be adequately secured;—is not unfrequently advanced in a form or advocated on grounds which imply, that if man is not responsible to man for his belief, so neither is he responsible to God. While among the young whom thoughtlessness or vice has inclined to infidelity, the doctrine is often employed as an excuse for their indifference to all religion,—either avowed explicitly as a tenet of their infidel creed, or more vaguely under the plea, that they are honest in their convictions, and cannot be blameable for holding, or for acting on honest convictions.

The question is thus one, which is well entitled to careful consideration among a body of young men, met as you are for intellectual and moral improvement,—who are either forming their opinions on many of the most important questions with which immortal beings can be occupied, or exposed in holding the opinions which they have embraced, and in which, perhaps, by godly parents they have been reared, to the assaults of infidelity. And a clear and thorough conviction of the responsibility to God, under which every belief is formed and held as well as acted on, cannot fail to be of immense importance in enabling you to discharge aright your duty, in dealing with all those questions of vital interest, which imperatively demand the investigation of intelligent and immortal beings, and a right solution of which is an essential element of that godliness, which has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.

In endeavoring to assist you in coming to a right decision on this question, we might examine it, either in the light of reason, or in the light of revelation, or in the light furnished by both; and in either, or in both of these ways, the doctrine which it is our wish to impress upon you, might, we think, be incontrovertibly established. Time, however, would fail to enter on a field so extensive, and we propose to consider the question chiefly as a question in Ethics, and to show you on consid-

erations of natural reason, that man is responsible for his belief; and that the grounds on which the opposite opinion is advocated, are unphilosophical and untenable. This may have the advantage of disembarassing your consideration of the question, of the jealousy which is not unfrequently entertained of Theological dogmas, as well as of better assisting you in meeting on their own ground the advocates of man's non-responsibility, who, unable to grapple with the clear and explicit testimony of Scripture on the subject, usually take refuge in the dim and broken light of reason, or in what they pompously term, the enlightened philosophy of modern times.

And first and before entering on the more rigid examination of the question, there is a preliminary remark as to a consequence inevitably resulting from the doctrine of man's non-responsibility for his belief, to which it will be of use to call your attention, as being fitted both to show you the extensive and vital bearings of the question under discussion, and to prove, as by a simple *reductio ad absurdum*, the untenableness of that doctrine,—and that is, that if man be not responsible to God for his beliefs, then there is scarcely any thing for which with consistency, he can be held to be responsible.

In religious matters especially—the most important of all—a man's habitual feelings and conduct must be chiefly determined by his beliefs. Nay, it might easily be shown, that certain feelings and actions, corresponding with the beliefs cherished, must as necessarily flow from these beliefs, as belief itself is supposed necessarily to flow from the manner in which the evidence of truth presents itself to the mind. Who can for a moment doubt, that the beliefs which a man entertains in relation to the questions,—whether the Bible is the word of God, or whether Christ is the son of God, and the Saviour of sinners, or whether man is here on trial for eternity,—an eternity which, terminating the evanescent distinctions of earth, shall know but two classes of men,—the good and the bad, the inhabitants of heaven, and the inhabitants of hell,—must of necessity tell, and powerfully tell, alike upon his feelings and his life?

Now, if there be no responsibility for belief, on what principle, or with what consistency, can a man be held responsible for the feelings or actions which flow from that belief, and which are only the necessary effect, the simple, natural, inevitable product of that belief.

With regard to actions in particular; whenever belief is the source

of action, if the belief itself be neither good nor evil, and not the subject of responsibility, it seems plainly absurd to hold, that action, which is but the expression or embodiment of that belief, can be possessed of such a moral character, as to render him who performs it subject to responsibility. This were to reverse the axiom, that actions have no moral character in themselves, but only in so far as they are the acts of an intelligent and moral agent; and that the good or evil which we ascribe to them, and which renders him who performs them praiseworthy or blameworthy in their performance, properly lies not in the actions, but in the principles,—the views, the feelings, the affections, the motives by which the agent has been actuated. This were to suppose that God looks to the outside alone, in dealing with his creatures as responsible, and overlooks the inward springs and sources of their conduct,—the view of Him, the feeling toward Him, the object or end in reference to Him,—all which are involved in belief,—by which that conduct has been determined. This were to imply, that should a man believe in his heart, the most High God to be a being like unto himself, or a hard and rigorous and cruel master, he could only be punishable for avowing or acting on such belief, but would at the same time be held guiltless for harboring the foul and dishonoring source of his practical ungodliness in his bosom.

It is true, that those who deny man's responsibility for his belief, do not usually admit, or, at least, do not usually advert to this necessary inference from their own doctrine; but on the contrary admit, that man, though not responsible for his belief, is still responsible for his actions; and one hears this curious theory of responsibility, not unfrequently avowed in such remarks as these, "It matters little what a man believes if his conduct is good;" or "His creed can't be wrong, whose life is in the right;" or "Men are Christians or Mahommedans just as they are trained; the great matter is an honest life." But the admission thus made, and which we have never seen even plausibly attempted to be shown consistent with the denial of man's responsibility for his belief, is usually made in a very qualified form;—made so as to admit of the condemnation of sins against society, whatever the belief in which they originate, but qualified so as to allow of most philosophical indifference to sins against God;—made so as to admit the condemnation of crimes, such as flowed from the creed of the Anabaptists of Germany, or would

inevitably follow the ascendancy of the doctrines of Socialism; but qualified so as to warrant the utmost complacency, in speaking of the genteel vices, that spring up unchecked, under the negative creed of the infidel; the practical ungodliness which results from the creed of the Socinian; or the degrading idolatry which is encouraged by the creed of the Church of Rome.

Indeed, without some such qualification, their doctrine, taken as a whole, would not subserve the purposes for which it seems to have been devised; and the only effect of admitting man's responsibility for his actions, while denying his responsibility for his belief, would be, that the one part of the doctrine would neutralize and nullify the other, and leave the whole subject of man's responsibility involved in inextricable confusion. Holding man to be not responsible for his beliefs, but responsible for his actions resulting from these beliefs, they would plainly free him with one hand, only to hold him fast with the other;—they would assure him, you shall never be condemned for thinking that to be truth, which God has declared to be error, or that to be lawful, which he has pronounced to be sin, but you shall infallibly be condemned for acting on that opinion;—they would deliver him from all fear of punishment for his beliefs, but leave him haunted with the fear of punishment for actions to which these beliefs inevitably led;—and the only solace that would thus remain to the infidel or heretic would be, that arising from the consideration, that he was placed under the government of an omnipotent Judge, who cared nothing for what he believed, but who, at the same time, might seize on him as a debtor to justice for allowing his beliefs to influence his life.

In a word, deny man's responsibility for his belief, and we do not see where you can stop, till you have freed him from all responsibility, or at the least, from all responsibility for actions flowing from belief, and till you have arrived at the conclusion, that the sceptic or the Pantheist, who believes that he has no duties to God, is innocent in neglecting every duty which God has enjoined.

But we come to the more rigid examination of the question.

And first, it is of importance that you understand distinctly and definitely the doctrine which we are to controvert, with the grounds on which it is usually made to rest, as well as the opposite truth which it is proposed to establish.

The doctrine of man's non-responsibility for his belief, it would have been desirable to present to you, in the words of some of its most distinguished supporters. That doctrine, it may here be mentioned, was the doctrine of the ancient philosophers, who, according to Sir J. McIntosh, "from Plato to Marcus Aurelius, taught, that error of judgment being *involuntary*, is not the proper subject of moral disapprobation." In the days of the Schoolmen, it was revived—or at least the leading principles on which it is usually rested—by the celebrated Scotus, who, according to the same authority, "contended at great length that our thoughts, (consequently our opinions,) are not subject to the will."* And as already intimated, it has in various forms been avowed or insinuated in modern times. We have not, however, been able to fall in with an exposition of the doctrine so brief, and at the same time comprehensive, as to enable us to present it to you in the words of its defenders, and we must endeavor to lay it before you in our own.

And the following propositions appear to us to embody, fairly and fully, the substance of the doctrine, with the grounds on which it is commonly rested,—or in other words, to present syllogistically the argument by which man's non-responsibility is supposed to be proved.

1. And first, grounding on the axiom, that belief is the assent of the mind to the evidence, by which any proposition submitted to it is established, it is assumed, that a man *necessarily* believes according to the view which his mind takes of the evidence,—or in other words, as one writer has expressed it, "that belief must necessarily, correspond with the perception of evidence, it being in the nature of things impossible, that the mind should believe or disbelieve, otherwise than as evidence is or is not discerned."

2. Secondly it is maintained, that a man is only responsible, when he has control over the operations of his mind,—or in other words, when the will is concerned in them.

3. And thirdly it is argued, that as a man's will is not concerned in his beliefs, as they are involuntary, as they spring up spontaneously and hold their place in his mind, whether he will or no, according as

* It would appear that S. did not explicitly state the conclusions, to which his own principles, logically carried out, would have led him. The language of Sir J. M., on this point is, "one step more would have led him to acknowledge, that all erroneous judgment is involuntary, and therefore inculpable and unpunishable, however pernicious."

the evidence connected with their object, has been discerned; or "as he," as Lord Brougham expresses it "can no more change them than he can the hue of his skin, or the height of his stature;" that therefore *he* cannot be responsible for them, and *they* cannot be made legitimately the subject of praise or blame.

This we conceive a fair statement; and at first sight we frankly admit it appears not a little plausible. But in answer we shall endeavour to establish the following positions, involving the proof of the directly opposite conclusion,—viz: that man is, and that most legitimately, the subject of responsibility for every belief which he entertains.

1st. That the above statement of the mode in which belief arises; and exists in the mind,—especially in so far as belief on moral and religious subjects is concerned,—is partial and defective, and overlooks an essential element involved in belief, and to which alone it is intended that responsibility attaches.

2nd. That it is not true, that in the formation of our beliefs, the will is not concerned; but that on the contrary, in reference to our beliefs on all moral and religious subjects, the will is concerned, and so far concerned as to involve the responsibility, which is admitted to belong to the products of the will. And,

3rd. That even if it be conceded, for the sake of argument, that the will cannot conclusively be shown to be concerned in belief, that still this would not exempt belief from responsibility; but that on the simple assumption, that God has presented evidence of any truth, the belief of the opposite must necessarily involve criminality and sin.

1. It is assumed then, as the basis of the argument for man's non-responsibility, that a man *necessarily* believes, according as evidence presents itself to his mind. And undoubtedly so far as belief is the product of mere intellect or reason, as contradistinguished from the *emotive* element of man's nature, and of that reason exercised about objects which address themselves to *reason alone*, the assumption is just. In such a case, belief is clearly the natural and necessary effect of the apprehension of the evidence by the reason. The examination of that evidence may, or may not, have been the product of will; but the belief itself, is just the irresistible assent of the mind to the evidence within its view. A man, for instance, cannot examine the records and the

traditions of Canada, without believing it to be a fact, that the General, whose monument still crowns the heights of Queenston, actually lived, and actually was slain in battle. No one can go intelligently over the steps of a demonstration in Euclid, without assenting to the truth of the proposition, which that demonstration establishes. Nor can any one master the details of astronomy, and learn how the theory which has immortalized the name of Newton, explains and harmonizes the facts of that science, without assenting to the soundness of the theory. And so in other cases.

And if this were all that is involved in every belief; if this were a correct and full account of the process by which every belief is formed, we do not see how it would be possible to resist the conclusion, that man cannot be held to be responsible for his belief.

> It appears to us a self-evident truth, that responsibility cannot justly attach to an act, or product of mere intellect or reason, altogether detached from, and unconnected with, any movement of the emotional element of our nature. Suppose for example, a simple and uncompounded intelligence,—a being with reason, but utterly without emotion, affection, conscience, or will, what would the knowledge, or belief of such an intelligence amount to? Why to the mere passive reflection, according to its peculiar properties, of the objects set before it. The intellect of such a being would but receive as passively as a mirror, the likeness or conception of the things brought within its view. Its conceptions would of course be more or less accurate and true, that is, more or less in correspondence with the reality conceived of, according to its own perfection or imperfection,—just as the reflections of a perfect mirror will be perfect, while in the case of an imperfect, it will be broken by flaws in its substance, or distorted by inequalities on its surface, or vitiated in coloring, by defects in its transparency; but still they would be as passive, as necessary, as completely beyond its own control, as are the reflections of the mirror. Not indeed that there would be no movement, no activity in an intellect of this kind; but it would be movement or activity, so to speak, according to fixed laws, operating *as if* from without; not movement or activity, directed by a governing power in the mind itself. Introduce into such an intellect, inclination or choice one way or other,—introduce in any form, a governing power such as we are able to form any conception of, and you just invest it

> with emotion, desire, will. And to the opinions or beliefs of an intellect thus passive, we do not see how responsibility could possibly attach; and in the same way to mere naked, uncompounded acts of reason in man, it seems as unreasonable to attach such responsibility.

> What renders man a responsible being, is not the simple fact that he has reason; but the fact, that in his nature, the element of reason is combined with an emotional element,—the fact, that he not only thinks, but that he has also feeling, affection, conscience, will. In a word, it is the emotional element in his nature, as existing in combination with the intellectual, that is the moral and responsible element.

In confirmation of this conclusion, it may be also well to remind you of what is universally conceded, that *intellection* or thought alone, is not, and cannot be the source of action. A mere intelligence, never liking or disliking, never approving or disapproving, never *willing*, would of course, never be prompted to action;—or if we could conceive of such a being in action, it would seem impossible to ascribe to such action any moral character, or to award to it either praise or blame. So that if we overlook the emotional element, there seems no basis on which responsibility can rest, either for belief *within*, or for action *without*.

> An unwarranted advantage accordingly, is given to the advocates of man's non-responsibility for his belief, by allowing them, as is often done, to rest unchallenged in the assumption which we are considering. And what we assert in opposition to this assumption is, that in relation to moral and religious subjects, the emotional or moral element,—that is the emotional excited about moral or religious objects,—*does* always enter into the belief, and thus renders it legitimately the subject of responsibility.

1. And first, we apprehend there could be no conception even, much less belief, in respect of moral and religious subjects, without the presence and movement in the mind of this emotional or moral element. It seems a simple impossibility, that a being without affection,—without love or hatred, benevolence or justice, could conceive of such affections and sentiments; or that one without conscience, could conceive of the distinction between right and wrong, virtue and vice, or of the feelings of approval and disapproval, always involved in the apprehension of that distinction. It seems impossible in a word, that a being without emotions could entertain any of the radical ideas, which enter necessarily into

every conception, as well as belief, in moral and religious subjects. As well might a man born blind be supposed to conceive of color, or one born deaf, of sound. Indeed only suppose the conception of love or hatred, benevolence or justice, approval or disapproval, and the very conception implies either the past or present consciousness of these feelings in the mind. Without this, conception would plainly want its vital element. Nay more than this, to accurate and vivid conception, not merely the past or present consciousness, but a *healthful* susceptibility of such emotions in the mind, at the time of forming the conception, would seem to be indispensable. A defect in respect of the soundness of such susceptibility, by vitiating, so to speak, the elements or materials out of which conception is formed, would affect the accuracy of the conception, a defect in respect of liveliness or intensity, would in like manner affect its vividness. And hence, it may be here remarked, a simple and philosophical explanation of a doctrine, often cavilled at, but not the less true on that account,—that a defect in the moral elements within,—that is in a man's own breast,—incapacitates for a right conception of moral objects without,—such as the character and law of God; and that a man's moral nature must be *right*, that he must be pure in heart, before he can see God. For on the principles which we have explained, as without a sense of benevolence and justice and the kindred moral emotions in his own bosom, a man cannot conceive of the corresponding qualities in God, so in proportion to the purity and strength of these feelings in the mind, must be the correctness and liveliness of his conceptions of the moral character of God.

2. But secondly we remark, that from the nature of the object *before* the mind when contemplating moral and religious subjects, the moral element *in* the mind, cannot possibly be in a state of indifference.

We may conceive an individual going for the first time, to the examination of the demonstration by which some proposition in Euclid is established, without being biassed by his feelings,—his liking or dislikings, one way or another; and we can conceive the assent of his mind being given to the truth of the proposition, without the concurrence or revolt of a single moral emotion with or from that assent. It may be a pure act of intellection. But it cannot be so, when the mind deals with moral or religious propositions. As certainly as the intellect is affected one way or another, by the presentation of intellectual truth, so must the moral nature be affected one way or another, by the presentation

of moral and religious truth. Just as the intellect assents or dissents so must the moral nature, like or dislike, approve or disapprove, embrace or spurn. Constituted as man is, it is impossible that the moral element in his bosom, will not be at work, according to its peculiar properties, in dealing with such questions as these;—with the question for instance, which in a mercantile community like this, may often suggest itself, whether a merchant pressed by business, may without violating the sanctity of the Sabbath, work up his accounts, or read his business letters on that holy day; or with the question now agitating the neighboring Union, whether the fugitive slave law is reconcilable with the principles of immutable justice; or with the question of wider importance, and eternal interest, whether the way of justification revealed in the Bible is by faith alone; or with that question which has made such havoc of the peace of the Churches, whether the doctrine of election is a doctrine of God. Whatever may have been a man's previous training, the simple presentation of such questions to his mind, will set in motion the moral elements in his bosom, and consciously or unconsciously, there will be a moral bias, inclining him to one side or the other. And not only so, but in deciding upon them, not merely the intellect, but the moral nature also, will, so to speak, sit in judgment. Nor will it be possible for him to come to a decision on either side, involving full,—that is settled and operative belief,—which does not carry with it, the assent of the moral nature,—the approval of the heart.

Nay such is the present state of our peculiar compound nature, that it is a notable and notorious fact, that in dealing with questions like these, the intellectual and moral elements do *not* always work in harmony. The emotive may mislead and overpower the intellectual, producing what is termed, *moral blindness*; or even after the intellect has been satisfied, and compelled to give assent, or at least brought into a state of conscious inability, to set aside the force of the evidence, and there has been fastened in the mind what we call a secret conviction of the truth, the moral element may still dislike, still hate the truth, and stand out in an attitude of proud and obstinate hostility. Who, for instance, has not met with a case, where a regard to self-interest was so obviously misleading, in spite of the convictions of a clear understanding, that we have been compelled to say, that the error was not in the understanding, but in the heart. Or who has not been conscious in his own

history, of evil inclinations, not only overbearing the authority of conscience, but the clearest convictions and beliefs of his understanding itself.

It is also of importance to observe, that even in looking at the mere evidence of truth, it is not the intellect alone that is concerned. This it is often found convenient, by the assertors of man's non-responsibility for his belief, to assume, in order that the intellect may be described, almost as if compelling belief through the views taken by it of the evidence of truth, irrespective altogether of the moral nature, or the estimate formed by that nature. But it should not be overlooked, that the evidence of moral and religious truth, is not like the evidence of an indifferent historical fact, or of a geometrical proposition; but includes more or less in all cases, and in some cases exclusively consists of, moral elements, and appeals directly to the moral nature. Take for example, the evidence of many of the most important conclusions of Natural Theology; or take, above all, what are called the "Internal Evidences of revealed religion," and it is plain that these cannot be apprehended, nor their force felt, except through the moral elements in a man's heart,—nay that to a proper decision concerning them, there is required the nicest exercise of moral discrimination. And such evidence will always appear stronger or weaker, according to the state of the moral nature, and indeed take its whole coloring, from the healthy or unhealthy, the sound or unsound state of the heart.

It seems then clear, that belief in respect of moral and religious subjects, must always involve a moral element,—nay more, if our statement has been sound, that *full* belief must involve, not only the assent of the understanding, but also of the heart,—the harmony of both elements of our compound nature with the truth. And if so, we see, why belief *may*, or rather, why belief *must* be subject to responsibility. It involves necessarily a *moral element*,—A LOVE OF THE TRUTH, OR A HATRED OF THE TRUTH; and unless we exclude all that makes us moral beings from responsibility, we cannot exclude belief.

And not only so, but we may now see *why it is*, that whatever the convictions of the understanding, an unsound belief must be evil, and therefore punishable. From the very passiveness of mere intellect in assenting to the evidence before it, of which the assertors of non-responsibility try to make so much, we may infer, that the usual conditions admitted on all hands as being essential to responsibility being

satisfied, viz: the reason being adequate to the investigation,—an opportunity of investigation being given,—and sufficient evidence being presented,—the only cause which can lead to an unsound belief, must be the moral element,—the opposition of the heart to the truth,—a hatred of the thing to be believed. Take away this hindrance, and mere reason would present none. And whether the unbeliever stand at the porch of the temple of truth, refusing assent to the evidence before him, or within the precincts of the temple itself, intellectually convinced, but still in heart refusing homage to the truth which is there enshrined, his unsound beliefs, no matter what plea of honesty he may urge on their behalf, must be regarded as punishable sins.

II. But secondly, it is argued by the assertors of man's non-responsibility, that responsibility can only attach to what is voluntary, or to acts of will; that the will is not concerned in the formation of our beliefs, that they are involuntary; and therefore that our beliefs cannot be subject to responsibility; and we are now to endeavor to show, that the will is concerned in our beliefs.

1. But first I must qualify my assent to the principle, that responsibility can only attach to what is called voluntary.

This principle seems to be very frequently conceded, though not always explicitly announced, by Ethical writers, and conceded in a very broad and unqualified form. And we find, even Dr. Chalmers, laying it down as an "all-important principle, that nothing is moral or immoral which is not voluntary."* Now if the principle be applied to actions alone, we fully concur in it; in this sense, it is only a familiar axiom universally recognised and acted upon in the world. But if it be extended so as to include the emotions, or what some writers term the pathological or pathematic elements of our nature, we hold it to be unsound and untenable. Where desire is regarded, as is the case with

*Dr. Chalmers appears to us to have been led into error in laying down the principle here referred to, from his desire to establish the position, that emotions inclining to good, if not cherished and not acted on by the will, are worthless. This position he has established with his usual clearness and force, but he has erred we conceive, both Ethically and Theologically, in assuming or seeming to assume, that the converse position is also true, and that emotions inclining to evil, which are not cherished or acted on by the will, are not evil. The reason why emotions in the first case are worthless, is, that the action of the will determines whether good or evil has the ascendancy in the heart, and in this case its action shows, that evil not good, has the ascendancy. But it does not follow that because emotions inclining to evil, may be shown by the action of the will not to have the ascendancy, but on the contrary to be successfully resisted, that therefore these emotions are not in themselves evil.

some writers, as identical with the will, or where as with others, desire is at least included under the term will, because an element essential to every volition, the principle might indeed be explained in a sense comparatively harmless; but where, as is usually the case, the will is regarded as a distinct faculty, and by what is voluntary is understood acts or decisions or the products of such acts or decisions of the will, the principle we deem to be as dangerous as it is unsound. The simplest and most spontaneous, and most involuntary affection toward, or desire for, what is morally evil, we hold to be itself morally evil and culpable,—nay, to be the very root and germ of all sin in the heart. The simplest rising of such a feeling in the heart,—as for instance, of enmity or hatred to God, or of the desire to escape the restraints of His law,—however speedily it may sink to rest under the rebuke of conscience, and although the only act of volition which may have taken place in connection with it, may have been an act directed to its suppression,—must, we conceive, be regarded as rendering a man criminal before God. Deny this, and you just deny, that the germ of sin is sin; and that that is evil and culpable, without which there would not, and could not be, an evil act of will.

And irrespective, therefore, of all reference to the will, if we have succeeded in showing, that a moral element is always involved in belief on moral and religious subjects, we would hold that man's responsibility for his belief has been established. But we think it can be shown, that the will is concerned in belief.

2. In order, however, to our illustration of this point, it will be of use here to refer to a distinction which is sometimes attempted to be drawn by the advocates of man's non-responsibility. It is the distinction between, man's responsibility for his mode of dealing with evidence, and his responsibility for belief itself. By some, his responsibility in the former case is admitted, while in respect of the latter, it is denied. And as undoubtedly the will is, if not chiefly, at least most palpably concerned in the treatment of evidence, a neglect to dispose of this distinction, might weaken the force of our proof.

Now we maintain, that we cannot thus dis sever, the dealing with the evidence on which belief must rest, from the belief itself. The one is an essential preliminary to the other; they are related as cause and effect; and the moral character which attaches to the former, must necessarily attach to the latter. Thus if an individual's dishonest

dealing with the evidence of truth,—prompted too, as may be the case, by his hatred to the truth itself, lead to an unsound belief, does not such dishonesty leave his unsound belief without excuse?—nay entitle us to characterize it as in reality *dishonest*? Or if a wilful searching for evidence on one side of a question, and a wilful neglect of the evidence on the other,—and this too prompted by the desire to establish some foregone conclusion,—leave a man in unbelief regarding it, how can this unbelief be estimated; but as *wilful* blindness?

The language of every day life in estimating the opinions of those, who in a question of practical duty, have allowed their judgments to be biassed by self-interest, shows what is the universal feeling on this point.

Keeping this in view, let us then see to what extent the will is concerned in the formation of belief.

1st. And first, we observe, the will is confessedly and necessarily concerned in the examination of the evidence of truth. Truth is not found by simply opening the eyes. It has to be searched for as we search for hidden treasures. He who expected to know all that it was essential he should know, by simply looking around him, would be as wise, as the man who should expect to understand the whole state and constitution of the world, by merely looking at the objects within the range of his own narrow horizon. Now the power of making the search after truth, is a power we are universally conscious of possessing. The power of directing the *attention*, we all feel, is a matter of will. We can go *as we will* to the examination of the evidence, on which any truth is presented to us. We can go, or we can refrain. We can adopt one mode of conducting the examination, or we can adopt another. We can be painstaking, or we can be careless in the examination. And when at any time we are satisfied with our examination of evidence, cease further inquiry, and thus settle down in any belief, is it not by an act of will that this is done? Nor is it by an act of will in which no regard is had to the moral aspects of the subject, that our dealing with evidence is thus regulated. On the contrary, in dealing with the evidence of moral and religious truth, the action of the will, is always chiefly excited by the moral aspects of the subject under review. As we have already seen, the moral nature is not, and cannot.

be, in a state of indifference in such a case, and thus the examination is always, not only directed by will, but by will under the influence of the emotions, proper to the moral nature.

This peculiar action of the will may be especially noticed, when an attempt is made to convince an individual of any truth which he is unwilling to believe. In such cases, the action of the will in dealing with the evidence, is notorious. As an excellent writer on this subject remarks, "Who indeed is there, who has not had the experience of how easy a task it is to convince a man by argument, when inclination has been first gained over;—and how hard and hopeless the task to satisfy him, when the will is in opposition?—how light the assault required to storm the citadel of the understanding, when the affections and desires have once capitulated, and how desperate the resistance, how determined and pertinacious the holding out, when the heart is hostile to the offered proposals, or to the grounds, however just and unexceptionable, on which they are presented?"—"Why do ye not understand my speech?" said Jesus to the Jews, "even because ye cannot hear," (that is ye cannot *bear*,) "my words."*

2nd. But again, while the will is thus invariably concerned in the formation of belief, no less invariably and necessarily, does it accompany, nay, incorporate itself with, every act of belief.

It appears to us that the province of will has, in general, been unnecessarily restricted, and that the will has to do as directly with belief on subjects of the kind we are referring to, as it has with action; or in other words, that there is as much an act of liking, of preference, of choice, in the one case, as in the other,—and neither more nor less of *necessity* in the determinations come to. The connection between the discoveries of the intellect and the decisions of the will, appears to us to be substantially similar to the connection, which subsists between the decisions of conscience and the decisions of the will. As the decisions of conscience do not always carry with them the assent of the will, so neither do the discoveries of the intellect. And as we do not consider the mere decision of the conscience, on the side of right, to be

*Dr. Wardlaw; whose excellent lectures on the subject under discussion,—although chiefly confined, as being originally delivered from the pulpit, to the religious and practical bearings of the question,—we would recommend for perusal.

the full approval of what is right, and do not look on the approval as full, until the will has decided in its favor ; so neither can we call that full belief, which consists merely in an intellectual conviction of the truth, but where the will refuses its assent.

But whatever may be thought on this point, which is too extensive for discussion at present, the fact which we have generally illustrated under the previous head, that the assent of the moral nature is always implied in *full* belief, necessarily involves the conclusion, that belief carries with it the assent of the will. For just suppose, that the assent of the will is withheld in belief, then one element of the moral nature, and that an index to the state of all the rest, would not be in harmony with the convictions of the understanding, and the belief therefore would not be full.

But the necessary connection of the will with belief, will be seen demonstratively, we apprehend, by attending to one important aspect, in which the objects of belief, on moral and religious subjects, must ever be contemplated, viz: the practical,—or the bearings of the thing believed, on that province over which the will has confessedly a supreme control.

In moral and religious subjects, full belief,—including the assent of the moral nature, as well as of the intellect,—must always point to action, and must thus include the decision of the will in reference to such action. In dealing with mere intellectual truth, as with an historical fact, or a geometrical demonstration, the belief formed may have no reference to action ; and the will may thus be conceived to be at rest with regard to it ; but in dealing with moral and religious truths, it cannot be so. Such truths not only invariably unfold direct practical obligations, but they necessarily require, for their full apprehension, a reference of the mind to the obligations thus unfolded, and to the idea of action, in harmony with, or opposed to these obligations. Let this aspect of these truths be overlooked, and then the whole truth is plainly not before the mind. It is impossible, for instance, to conceive of a man making up his mind on the questions, whether the Bible is a Revelation from Heaven, or whether it reveals a way of salvation for sinners ; or,—to take particular questions referable to the decision of the Bible,—whether it is lawful in any circumstances to misstate the truth with a mental reservation, or to do that which is in itself evil that good may come, without having the practical bearings

of such questions prominently in his view. And in coming to a conclusion upon them, in entertaining a full belief, on the one side or the other, there must therefore be involved, an adoption or repudiation of the obligations connected with the truth, and a determination of the will, as to a certain course of action to be pursued.

It is true that popularly, the term belief is applied to the convictions of the understanding alone, without reference to the state of the will. But while this may be correct in speaking of the conclusions of the understanding, in reference to subjects addressing themselves to *reason alone*; it is incorrect in speaking of such conclusions or convictions, in reference to moral and religious subjects. It is an error to call such convictions *full* belief; similar to what it would be, to call mere convictions of conscience the full approval of what is right, while overlooking the mode in which the will was deciding. To full belief on such subjects, there must be a concurrence of the will with the understanding. In the formation of such belief, the decisions of the one are so incorporated with the conclusions of the other, that take away the approving decision of the will, and you inevitably destroy full belief, and leave only that kind of belief in which there is a disruption and contrariety, between the intellect and the moral nature, the head and the heart. Let us suppose, for example, that a man holds it as a speculative belief, that it is his duty to embrace, and obey, and openly profess, the gospel; but suppose, that there is no corresponding decision of his will, actually leading him to carry out his belief in action; is it not perfectly legitimate to infer, that his belief is not of the right kind, that it is not *full*, that he is still not really decided in his belief on the subject. Only when his will is so decided in favor of the practical obligations involved in his professed belief, as to render him prepared to act upon them, can we ascribe to him full belief? Nay, so essential is this action of the will to full belief, that even in the case of beliefs which we feel to be evil, and where we are least ready to suspect a contrariety between the moral nature and will, and the thing believed, we are accustomed to say, when a man recoils from acting out his belief, that his belief is not thorough. Thus let an individual speculatively believe, that the word of God sanctions the extermination of heretics, after the manner of the Church of Rome; but let his moral nature dissent, let his will recoil from the practical enforcement of such a belief, and we should

feel at once, that his belief wanted a vital element, and that it could not be termed full.

And if an act of will, deciding with reference to the practical bearings of the thing believed, is thus incorporated with belief, in the very act of its formation ; still more clearly is it incorporated with every recognition of the belief, when it becomes a positive source of action. It is only through the will, that belief, or any thing else in the mind, can become a source of action. And it matters not what may be the view taken of the nature of the will, or of the mode in which its decisions are come to, whenever a belief leads to action, there must precede it, an act of will, involving a decision in favor of the *whole thing* believed. To deny this, were to suppose, that the will might be determined by a belief, while yet there was no moral harmony between the will and the thing believed ;—a supposition which would reduce the will to the condition of a mere blind unconscious executor of belief ;—and which would take away every thing like a basis for man's responsibility, and furnish as good reason for freeing him from responsibility for his acts of will, as for his beliefs themselves.

In fact, it is only by this conjunction of an approving decision of the will, with the convictions or conclusions of the understanding, that belief can become, what *full* belief is universally acknowledged to be, an operative practical principle. When once the will has assented to the conclusions of the understanding, when once, in other words, belief is *full*, the belief naturally and inevitably comes to operate, as a motive in determining the future decisions of the will ; or rather the belief now takes its place in the mind, not in the form of a mere intellectual conviction, with which the will may be at war, but in the form of a conviction, accompanied with a fixed and settled purpose of action in the mind,—or, in other words, as an operative practical principle. But before the assent of the will has been given, the belief cannot thus have any influence on action ; and the will must first decide in harmony with the conclusions of the understanding, before the belief can be possessed of the power, or entitled to the name of a principle. Thus to recur again to the case of religious belief, or belief in the gospel, what is it, that is commonly called speculative belief, as distinguished from full, or as it is sometimes termed by Divines, *saving* belief. Is it not just a belief, which has its seat in the

understanding merely, which consists only in certain convictions of the reason, but from which the moral nature and the will dissent; or with which, at least, they are not in harmony? And what on the other hand is the real, or full belief, which is so clearly distinguishable from this merely speculative belief; is it not just such a belief as involves the harmony of the moral nature with the truths of the gospel, and the assent of the will to the practical obligations which these truths unfold; and which has thus an operative power, to regulate and purify the life? And which of these kinds of belief, are we accustomed to designate, or do we feel to be entitled to the designation of, a *principle of belief*? Unquestionably the latter alone:—even as we never fail to feel, it is the belief, which alone can entitle any one to be designated a *true believer*, a *true Christian*.

I doubt not that you can scarcely have failed, to draw this distinction for yourselves between beliefs in religion. It may be that some of you have had experience of both kinds of belief in your own hearts; and we think you cannot refer, either to your observation, or experience, without finding evidence of the fact, that the will is necessarily involved in the formation of belief, whether that belief be sound or unsound.

On the ground then, that will is involved in every belief on moral and religious subjects, we see why belief must be as much subject to responsibility, as any thing else in which the will is involved. And not only so, but on the principles which we have explained, we are now prepared, more particularly to show you, that every *unsound* belief, must be the product of an *evil will*; and as such itself evil and culpable.

Those who entertain unsound beliefs, may be ranked among one or other, of the following classes:—

Those who are determined not to be convinced,—who will not trouble themselves to examine the truth,—and who shut their eyes against the light.

Those who from thoughtlessness or indifference, examine carelessly and superficially, and do not deal with the truth in the way which its high importance, and their own best interests, demand.

Those who have made a partial, prejudiced, and one-sided examination.

Those whose reason is unable to resist the force of the evidence be-

fore them, but whose hearts still refuse to submit.

And lastly, those who seem to have made thorough and fair examination, and to have honestly arrived at the unsound belief which they entertain.

Now with regard to the first four of these classes, there can be no difficulty. No nice analysis is required here. An evil will, so to speak, is written on their foreheads. If their unsound beliefs be not the product of will, and of will deciding on the side of evil, we do not see, how anything a man *is*, or *does*, can be called a product of his will, and of that will choosing evil.

The only apparent difficulty is in relation to the last class specified,—the class who seem to have arrived *honestly* at an unsound belief;—a class, however, whose representatives are but very rarely to be found. But even their case will be found, on the principles which we have explained clearly to involve an evil will.

For, the conditions essential to responsibility in all cases, and to which we have already referred, being supposed to be satisfied, if the will had not misled them in dealing with the evidence of truth before them, a sound conclusion, a right belief would necessarily have been come to.

Again in cherishing the full belief of error which they entertain, the will has decided in favor of that which is evil;—there has been a liking, an approving, a choosing of that evil;—and especially, there has been a resolving or determining to act upon the practical obligations, not to good, but to evil, which the object of their belief appeared to unfold; and in all this, there has of necessity been, what is sinful, culpable, punishable. Nay, had the will in their case been in harmony with the truth, it could not have decided in favor of error. In the case of a being whose will was pure, was in perfect harmony with the will of God, all the *decisions* of the will, would necessarily be in harmony with the truth of God. It could not approve or choose as good, that which God regarded as evil,—that which God had revealed as evil,—and reject that which He had revealed as good. Or if before pure, the first act of this kind, would be the first act of sin. And we are thus shut up to the conclusion, that wherever an unsound belief on moral and religious subjects is formed, it involves an evil act of the will. In the case of the class referred to, there may be, so to speak, less moral depravity,

less strength of evil will, and consequently less of criminality connected with their unsound belief, than in the case of the former; but still their unsound belief, is no less certainly the product of will, and no less really, as such, evil and culpable.

III. But this leads us to the last argument which we proposed to illustrate.

Many are apt to feel puzzled in attempting an analysis of mental processes, and to think that conclusions which can only be arrived at through such an analysis, are placed beyond their reach. Now it appears to us, that disposing of the points we have been examining as you may,—or at least conceding it, for the sake of argument, to be difficult, or even impossible to determine, whether and to what extent the moral nature and the will are concerned in belief; still there is a short and simple way, by which an unbiassed mind may arrive, even on principles of natural reason, at the conclusion, that man is responsible for his belief.

Let us just suppose that there is such a thing as truth, on moral and religious subjects,—that God has furnished us with sufficient evidence of that truth,—and that he has given us an opportunity of investigating such evidence, as well as understandings competent to the investigation; then it appears to us to follow as self-evident truth:—

First, that we are solemnly bound to investigate that truth, and upon the evidence furnished to receive it;—the fact of God's presenting to us the truth in the way supposed, virtually involving a command to receive it.

Secondly, that the failure to receive that truth, and the belief of the opposite, implies contrariety to God,—opposition to his will, to his command, to his law.

And thirdly, that whatever the particular way in which that unsound belief may have been formed in the mind, its simple presence there, implies moral evil,—something which in its very nature must be hateful to God, something which he must condemn.

Under the government of a wise, holy, and benevolent Being, a rightly constituted mind,—a mind in harmony with the mind of the Creator, in harmony too with the truths revealed by that Creator,—would be prepared to receive and choose and delight in, such truths and in them alone. Such a mind would have no elements within it, to

harmonize with any opposite errors. The harmonizing with such,—the belief of such,—can only be accounted for, on the supposition of darkness, disorder, moral evil, *sin*, that which is justly the subject of punishment.

Such is the argument which we proposed to submit to you; and its weight we must leave to be estimated by yourselves. Had time permitted, we should have liked to confirm the conclusion arrived at, by an appeal to the testimony of conscience,—to the practical judgment of mankind,—and to the explicit statements of Scripture. But we can only say a word about each.

1. As to the testimony of conscience, let us take one case. A man finds reason to change his belief about the character of God, or about some important Bible truth. From having the belief about God and his moral government, which arrays him in the attributes of a stern and vindictive judge, he comes to have the beliefs, which invest him with the attributes of a kind and forgiving father; or from believing that he must seek deliverance from wrath by his own works, he comes to believe, that he may find it through a simple reliance on the merits of a crucified Saviour. And what is the decision of conscience about his former beliefs? All who have undergone the change will tell you, that it amounts to a most pungent and overwhelming testimony against those beliefs as evil. And similar illustrations might be multiplied indefinitely. It is true that men often seem, to have no trouble of conscience about the unsound beliefs which they cherish. But if it be really the case that conscience is thus asleep within them, will not the defect in their moral state, which that unsound belief of itself implies, more than sufficiently account for it.

2. Again, what is the practical judgment of the world about unsound beliefs? Do men usually look upon them all, as free from moral evil and inculpable, if they are only sincere? Do not, on the contrary, some beliefs fill us instinctively with horror,—and do we not shrink from him who entertains them, as from the touch of a serpent, and all the more vehemently, if we think that he is sincere in holding them? We doubt if the sturdiest assertor of man's non-responsibility for his beliefs, that ever formed the resolution, "henceforward nothing shall prevail upon us to praise or to blame any one for that, which he can no more change than he can the hue of his skin, or the height of his stature,"

could sit beside a *sincere* Thug,—for it would seem that there are really such,—however innocent of actual crime, and however little likely to exercise his vocation upon his own person, without feeling in his own breast, a testimony to the fact, that such beliefs are evil,—abominable,—nay vehemently to be condemned. And what is this, but a practical illustration of the fact, that men are sometimes compelled, and that, so to speak, in spite of themselves and their philosophical theories, to feel that there is moral evil in erroneous beliefs, and even to treat them as culpable.

3. And finally, what saith the word of God about belief and unbelief?

A few passages will suffice.

“And this is his commandment that we should believe on the name of his son Jesus Christ.* This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.”† “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shall be saved.¶ He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”**

“With the heart man believeth unto righteousness.†† Take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.¶¶ This is the condemnation that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*** Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.”†††

“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.”¶¶¶

Here we have belief, first, represented as a duty,—made the subject of a command,—the response to which is an act of will; secondly, held forth as the turning point of salvation,—that by which a man is saved,—for the want of which he is condemned; and thirdly, described as having its seat in the heart, and involving the assent of the heart.

Here too we have belief traced, first, to an evil heart; secondly, to the love of darkness or sin; and thirdly, and most explicitly to the will.

And here too we are informed, that a right moral state is the grand prerequisite to a sound belief.

And thus we have, as it appears to us, every position, which on grounds of reason have been advanced and advocated, sanctioned and confirmed

*John III. and 23d. †John VI. and 29th. ¶Acts XVI. and 31st. **Mark XVI. and 16th. ††Romans X and 10th. ¶¶Hebrews III. and 12th. ***John III. and 19th. †††John V and 40th. ¶¶¶John VII. and 17th.

by the word of God,—whose deliverances, as has been well said, will be always found in harmony with the conclusions of a sound philosophy. ✓

In conclusion, just allow me as briefly as possible, to refer, as I did at the outset, to the practical improvement to be made of this subject.

I know not, my young friends, what are your individual beliefs; and it is not my province at present, to deal with you particularly about these. But if I have succeeded, to any extent, in the argument now laid before you, there is one lesson grounded on it, which I am warranted to impress upon you all, and that is,—to cherish a deep and habitual sense of the solemn responsibility to God, under which every belief you have already formed is cherished, and under which every belief you may hereafter adopt, while engaged in the investigation of truth, shall be entertained. A sense of this, will be your safeguard against many errors,—your surest guide to the knowledge and belief of the truth. It is an idle dream, that there is no moral good or evil in belief; or that the searcher of hearts can regard with indifference, those potent springs of action, which indicate so truly the state both of the understanding and of the heart in reference to himself and to the *truth*, and which infallibly determine the tenor of a man's life. If reason or revelation is to be trusted to, your beliefs will save you, or your beliefs will damn you. They will determine your character here, they will decide your destiny in eternity.

Beware of the levity, the thoughtlessness, the indifference, which cannot be troubled to give to the search after truth, and especially the highest of all truth,—the truth as it is in Jesus,—the time, the labour, the patience, the perseverance, which the importance of the object demands.

Beware of the bias on the side of error, which springs from a defective moral nature and an evil will, and which will be ever ready to seduce you, in the form of the wish, that what is distasteful, or what would put an arrest on impure indulgencies, may not be true,—or the forgone conclusion which must at all hazards be established,—or the desire to be at one with a party, instead of being at one with the truth itself.

And above all, beware of that hostility to the truth, which may remain in the heart, after the understanding has felt the force of its evidence,—and which may tempt you to trample on reason and con-

science together, that you may worship some idol in its room.

In a word, search after the truth, as for the very springs of life ;—by careful self-government and moral discipline, lay aside the shackles and encumbrances which an undisciplined state of the understanding and the heart, never fails to impose on the inquirer after truth, and train yourselves for earnest, thoroughgoing investigation ;—and as fallen and dependent beings, fail not to seek the aid of that divine teacher,—that Spirit of truth,—who is promised to them that ask him, and who will lead you into all truth.

Young, ardent, elastic, full of hope, and free from the depressing influence of the cares and disappointments, that never fail to gather around men of advancing years, the present has doubtless many peculiar charms to allure you ; still amidst all your keen relish of life, keep it ever before you, that you are on trial for eternity. As certainly as you have succeeded the men of a former generation, so certainly will another generation arise to fill the places that you now occupy. A little time,—it may be a very little time,—and you must stand face to face with the God of truth,—the great fountain and standard of truth,—the glorious Being, whose immutable truth is the corner stone on which rests the stability of the universe ; and set in the blaze of that light ineffable,—searching all things, revealing all things, discovering every speck of darkness and of sin, Oh ! never forget, that that only will be found *truth in you*, which is in harmony with His mind and will, in harmony with His eternal truth. Knowing the truth, believing the truth, you will be found resting on that which cannot fail, and in a higher sense than can ever be the case on earth, as pure in heart you will see God. But believing what is not the truth,—resting on what is not the truth,—the very truth of God which endureth for ever,—the foundation on which you have built, must inevitably sink from under you, a mockery, a delusion, a lie.

APPENDIX.

We cannot forbear simply noticing by way of appendix, the elucidation which, it appears to us, the principles explained in the foregoing Lecture, may be employed to furnish of some of the most important doctrines of Scripture.

1. By these principles, an explanation is furnished of the difference,—referred to in the Lecture, but in a Theological point of view, deserving of special notice,—the difference between a *speculative* and a *saving* belief or faith; a subject about which many persons appear to be puzzled. In real or saving faith, there is a harmony of the moral nature with the truths that relate to the way of salvation by Christ, including the assent of the will to Gospel offers, and to the practical obligations which the Gospel unfolds; by which the belief becomes an operative principle, working by love, purifying the heart, and overcoming the world. In the case of merely speculative faith, there is only the conviction of the understanding, so far as such conviction can exist with reference to moral and religious truth, such as the gospel reveals, separate and alone; but there is no harmony of the moral nature, no assent of the will, with the truth; and the belief thus remains dead, inoperative and worthless.

2. The same principles explain, how true faith *must always* be, a spring or source of holy obedience. Implying the assent of the moral nature and will to the practical obligations unfolded in the truths of the Gospel, it must of necessity lead to action in harmony with these truths. It enlists, as it were, on the side of holiness, the whole active powers of the soul, and thus inevitably produces evangelical obedience.

3. These principles also explain the reason of the prominence which is given to faith in the Gospel, and in particular, why justification is connected with *faith alone*. By faith, of the kind which we have described, the soul is brought into harmony with the mind and will of God, and especially with that mind and will in relation to the free way of salvation by Christ,—the way by which “God is just in justifying the ungodly.” There is thus, in a variety of aspects in which this harmony may be regarded, what some divines term, a fitness or decency in faith to be the instrument or means of justification.

4. Upon these principles, it may also be seen, why a subjective change, wrought in the heart by the Spirit of God, is necessary to the exercise of faith. In the unregenerate state, the moral nature of man is opposed to the truth of God revealed in the Gospel;—it cannot rightly approve of that truth, and the will

cannot, or rather *will* not, close with the offers of the Gospel, and submit to the practical obligations, the acknowledgment of which a right reception of the Gospel implies; and till a change be wrought in the heart, there can therefore be no true belief. By changing the moral nature, by bringing it into harmony with the mind and will of God, the Spirit imparts the power of believing; and belief or faith thus comes as a natural and necessary result to be exercised. By the first act of faith, the work of regeneration, begun in the subjective operation of the Spirit in the heart, is completed, the soul being then vitally united to Christ. And under the influence of this faith, now existing in the soul as an operative practical principle, the work of sanctification is carried on,—believers being more and more sanctified, through the belief of the truth.

5. On the same principles, we may explain, how faith's being the *one only* pre-requisite to justification, makes salvation *free*, or how, as the apostle expresses it, "it is by faith that it might be by grace." Faith, as the fruit of the Spirit's subjective operation in the heart, is itself a free gift of God; in its exercise it implies the reception of salvation as a free gift; and by its influence it produces the only holy obedience of which a sinner is, or can be capable, thus making obedience itself, on which sinners are so prone to rest for acceptance with God, a fruit of grace.

6. And lastly, on the same principles we see, with what justice sinners are condemned for unbelief. Unbelief implies a contrariety of the moral nature, and especially of the will, to the truth of God. And it involves a *wilful* rejection of the free gospel salvation, and a *wilful* persistence in sin,—attended with the fearful aggravation, of a contempt of the brightest display of God's moral perfections and saving grace ever made to the universe, and a resistance to the most powerful motives ever brought to bear upon the human heart.

The members of the Association, which has undertaken the publication of the foregoing Lecture, will, it is hoped, excuse this addition to it; as it may direct their attention to several new and important aspects of the subject which it discusses, and stimulate them to the investigation of some momentous questions, with which the subject has a natural connection, but of which the Lecture does not directly treat.